

THE BIG BASH



In Dabney's Dreamland—electronically synchronized fountains cascade in a setting of filtered light.



In Blacker's courtyard—a showboat (the Vernon L. Sturnferst) rides at anchor in a man-made river.

“HEY, I need two coolies,” a voice bawled out—but the Techman took it as an invitation to hide behind the paint brush he was daubing with. A thing possessed had descended upon the troops. A pressing deadline had concentrated a week's work into a day's. Even Snakes had become aware that commotion made study difficult. Self-appointed Legrees were tossing work to anyone not moving. Nothing like the old communal atmosphere.

The Techman wondered if Marx would have approved the dance as good training. He began to appreciate the fallacies of communist philosophy.

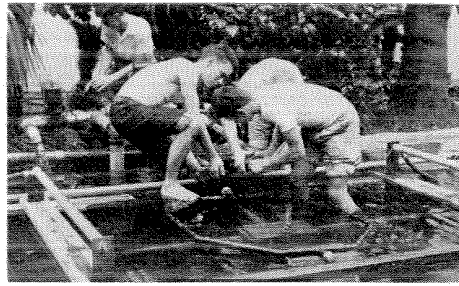
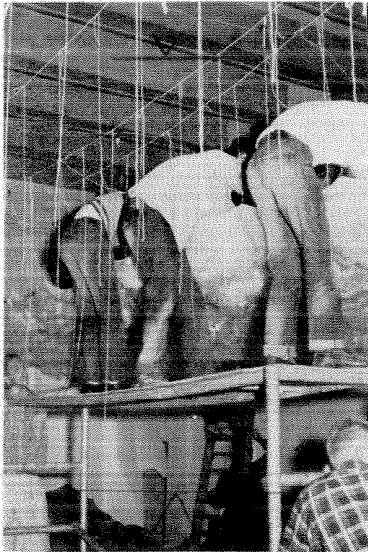
“This thing's so great I think I'll get a date for it,” his paintbucket partner interrupted. No comment. That was a real “guts play” from a guy who hadn't had a date since the last Interhouse.

“Bet it rains tonight,” one of the sunny-side-up boys interjected. He was put down by silence. The Interhouse Dance was Tech's principal claim to fame in the social realm and everyone knew damn well it couldn't rain. When completed it would reveal how futile similar attempts of all other schools were. As a onetime fraternity man he wasn't completely convinced of this, but believing made the work less irritating.

He had to admit that if ingenuity could make a dance, the prophecy would be fulfilled. Talent and drive not often tapped was being shoved into the sunshine of the courtyard and it was good. He wondered how these guys managed to hide themselves so well during the rest of the year. Both money and energy were being expended prodigally. A gentleman's agreement had set a limit of \$500 per house. It was a well-meant but impossible gesture. A pre-dance estimate from one house had totaled \$950. This was madness, thought the Techman. So had they; they pared it to \$600.

A shower, a meal and a look to see what classes had been missed last week, then back to the brain-child. With all the purpose and diligence of Noah, the troops were striving to catch lost time. There was an unrelenting clamor from seven to four a.m., the whir of buzz-saws and collisions of hammers. The Techman had serious misgivings about his choice of a courtyard room.

Last minute scenery additions rounded the atmosphere while the Techman dragged himself to pick up his woman. Pre-parties filled the alleys with shuttling guests.

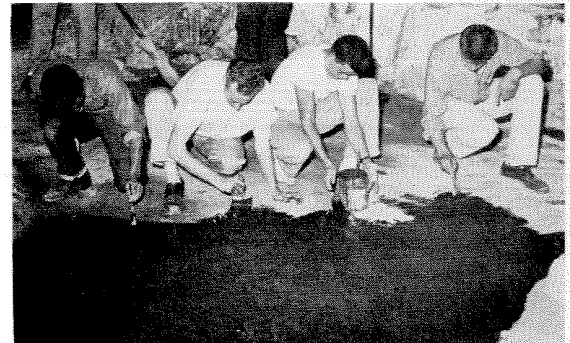


With coöperative labor, a week's work can be concentrated into a day's.

Curiosity soon prodded the Techman and date to other houses. His pride assured him that nothing could withstand critical comparison with his house's creation.

Early arrivals had chanced wet paint and stray tools, but by nine o'clock all was clear. Dance music shaded from Guy Lombardo to progressive. Fountains spewed refreshments and it was "elbows in" dancing throughout the evening. Where all the people had come from he wasn't quite sure; maybe some were those 300 instructors who were reputed to be at Tech for his benefit.

With churning paddlewheel and a whistle to strike envy into any locomotive, the original "Showboat" spanned the lake that once was Blacker's courtyard. He knew the whistle worked; the boys finished installing



The size of the crowd proves that the Interhouse is still Tech's principal claim to fame in the social realm.

it last night and its testing had jerked him from his coma like a bucket of ice water.

In the room perspective had been distorted; he began to feel Dabney's "Dreamland." He was pleasantly lost for a moment. Outside, electronically synchronized fountains cascaded in a setting of filtered light.

As a newly-caged animal eventually settles into the luxury of captivity, so the milling throng became familiar with the spectacle and the air relaxed.

The sunken hull of Verne's *Nautilus* guarded the olive walk entrance to Throop Club. Above dancing couples, undulating tentacles seemed to keep half-time to the cool music. Buddha teleported his likeness to approve the Chinese garden that was Ricketts. All was theme. Moat, drawbridge and dungeons marked Fleming's medieval castle. Suits of armor lined the wall. A coffin of nails reminded his fatigue that it was past midnight and he should sleep.

Money's worth

It was a peaceful day like one after exams. The campus was an oasis of tranquility between California and San Pasqual streets. The Techman smoked himself to his next class. It was sparsely settled; guys who lived far away had left early for the Thanksgiving holiday. This was the last class of the day and he was anxious to be on the road too. He would have hated to miss class for the simple reason that then he wouldn't be getting his money's worth. In this respect he was a campus anomaly.

The instructor's back followed the all-knowing chalk across the blackboard. He was mumbling every third symbol and arriving at the result it had taken the Techman two hours to achieve the night before. The instructor finally broke from the board with, "So you see there's nothing conceptually new in this problem; just draw the free-body diagram."

I'll bet this guy was conceived through a free-body diagram, thought the Techman. The bell rang like a reprieve, signalling the end of his money's worth.

It was still a beautiful day, but tomorrow would be better, even if it rained—Thanksgiving and all the trimmings. One of the most valuable courses offered on campus, he mused, was "How to Appreciate Your Mother's Cooking," proctored by the student house kitchens. Yes sir, Turkey, Thanksgiving and all the trimmings.

It was the best to be home, home with the old folks and the guys he had grown up with. It was almost tradition now for the old gang to get together over the holiday.

"Hi, St. George, how's life in the monastery? You sure look thin, what do they feed you up there besides books?"

"Oh, we get smog and student house food."

The Techman was on the defensive; it was all right for him to criticize, but let someone else take a verbal poke at Tech and his jaw jutted. It irritated the hell

out of him to see the "wiser-in-the-ways-of-the-world" smirks on the faces of his old liberal arts buddies. He tried to dismiss it as the compensation of clods who mistook rumors and appearances for facts.

Something had happened to him since he'd been at Tech that he knew could have happened few other places. It was probably the living and associating with people of broader and richer philosophies than those of most of the college men he had known elsewhere. Maybe there was even a touch of the religious in it; he wasn't sure. Whatever it was was worth all the booze parties in the world. This he knew and felt, and there were few things he both knew and felt. Not that he had anything against "living," but he knew it existed at Tech as a diversion, not as an end or even a means.

He had better not let the stuff they had put under his skin show through or these guys would never lay off.

I'll just play along, he decided.

"How do you boys like fraternity life?" the Techman queried.

"It's great for the social life. How do you guys up there study without social life?"

"What do you mean? We have plenty of social life at Tech. We have exchanges and dances and Throop Club Stags and even election rallies with beer for those over 21 and root beer for those under."

"Gee whiz, we didn't realize you fellas had such a raucous existence. Where do you keep your women?"

"Oh, we can take them up to the rooms until 10:30 on week nights or 12:30 on weekends and sometimes till 1:00 on big dance nights like the Interhouse."

"Why do they set an arbitrary time like 10:30? That doesn't sound scientific to me."

"I guess they figure if time is called at 10:30, the girl has a fighting chance," he answered sarcastically.

Rough life

"What kind of beer you drinking now, St. George? You a Coors man yet?"

"No, I don't get much beer at Tech. Beer is strictly taboo, say the rules."

"How do you study?"

"Oh, we manage," he replied with consummate modesty.

"Boy, what a rough life you guys must lead. No beer. They even get beer in the Army."

"I know, but would I join to get it?"

Beer taboo? He couldn't remember anyone being on probation for liquor.

"Why don't you have a beer with us?" his host invited.

"OK, I'll try one of your 'Coors'," accepted the Techman. Sitting in the sun, nipping the beer, he felt at home. He sure wished he'd brought a book; the beer didn't taste quite right without one.

—Tom Dodge '57